

Exhibit 19

PATERSON PRESS

Bitter rivals agree to 'do-over' in disputed Paterson election

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PATERSON — Facing allegations of vote fraud, Councilman-elect Alex Mendez has decided to accept a judge's proposal that would negate his victory in the May election and set up a new contest for Paterson's 3rd Ward City Council seat.

After a bitter battle in the spring election, Mendez and former Councilman William McKoy will engage in a rematch that could shape the city's political landscape for the next two years. Mendez had loomed as Mayor Andre Sayegh's main opponent in the 2022 mayoral race after he beat McKoy by 240 votes in the spring.

But six days before Mendez was scheduled to take office as a councilman on July 1, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office announced he was being charged with election fraud crimes, accusations that are pending. A judge subsequently ruled that the 3rd Ward council seat should stay vacant until the resolution of McKoy's civil lawsuit claiming there was widespread wrongdoing in the election.

The two sides still must appear before Superior Court Judge Ernest Caposela to iron out the details of the deal that would settle their dispute through a special election instead of through potentially protracted litigation.

Exactly when the special election would be held is not clear, lawyers for the two candidates said. That would be determined after a hearing before Caposela, probably later this week, the attorneys said. Mendez and McKoy are both predicting victory.

"We are confident that with a new election and full participation from the community, Alex will prevail and take his seat without going through all the effort and inconvenience of litigation," said Mendez's lawyer, Gregg Paster.

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In the spring, Mendez asserted that election officials disenfranchised Latino voters by disqualifying hundreds of mail-in ballots for people with Hispanic surnames. McKoy also maintained that many of his political supporters had their ballots rejected.

“We are pleased that Mr. Mendez has acknowledged that a new election is needed, which is what we have been asking for since we filed this lawsuit,” said McKoy’s lawyer, Scott Salmon. “In an election that is actually free and fair, we are confident that Councilman McKoy will win and be able to continue his long and distinguished service on behalf of the people of Paterson.”

McKoy and Mendez both ran for mayor in 2018, with Mendez finishing second to Sayegh and McKoy coming in fourth in the six-man field. McKoy had been on the City Council for 20 years until he lost to Mendez in May.

Paterson already is holding a special election for the 2nd Ward council seat, after Shahin Khalique and Mohammed Akhtaruzzaman finished in a tie in the May contest. Khalique had represented the 2nd Ward on the council for the past four years, and Akhtaruzzaman held the seat during the four previous years.

The 2nd Ward special election has been scheduled for Nov. 3, and candidates seeking to run for the seat must submit nominating petitions by Aug. 31.

More than 3,200 ballots cast in Paterson’s all-vote-by-mail municipal races in May were disqualified for various reasons, a fact that President Donald Trump has cited in several Tweets asserting that absentee voting leads to election fraud.

In its final vote-by-vote report on the Paterson contests, the Passaic County Board of Elections did not cite fraud as the basis for discounting any of the 3,274 ballots that were rejected. The report said about 1,200 rejections stemmed from signature discrepancies and problems. Another 1,000 were disqualified because of deficiencies on the section of the ballots that must be filled out by the "bearer," the official title for anyone who delivers the ballot on behalf of the voter.

About 1,150 ballots were disqualified in the 3rd Ward, the county report said.